

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: February 26, 2007

From :  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item 11: Consideration of resolution authorizing two grants, one contingent upon budget authority approval in the FY 07-08 State Budget, to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for the acquisition of APNs 649-0-070-050, 649-0-070-060, 649-0-070-360, 648-0-200-020, and 648-0-183-050 on the south-facing slope of Chatsworth Peak, unincorporated Los Angeles County.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing the following two grants to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA): 1) a Proposition 50 grant in an amount not to exceed \$50,000 and 2) a Proposition 84 grant in an amount not to exceed \$225,000, contingent upon budget authority approval in the FY 07-08 State Budget, for the acquisition of APNs 649-0-070-050, 649-0-070-060, 649-0-070-360, 648-0-200-020, and 648-0-183-050 on the south-facing slope of Chatsworth Peak, in unincorporated Ventura County, with the total grant amount not to exceed \$250,000.

Legislative Authority: Section 33204(c) of Public Resources Code.

Background: Chatsworth Peak is part of the critical inter-mountain range habitat linkage between the Santa Susana Mountains and the Simi Hills. In regards to this habitat linkage, most attention has focused on the north-facing slope of the peak more specifically on the connection between Santa Susana Pass and Box Canyon Road. However, a high quality habitat linkage also exists across the south-facing slope via Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park. The south-facing slope contains a high concentration of large sandstone outcrops and unique micro-habitats. However the only protected land between the State Historic Park and Box Canyon is an approximately 10-acre open space area owned and managed by the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District (RSRPD).

Efforts are underway to develop residences on many of the other lots in this corridor. One such threatened ownership is the Zorro's cabin parcels that the RSRPD was outbid on earlier this year. The Conservancy's \$100,000 grant to RSRPD towards the acquisition of that parcel was subsequently terminated. The general Zorro's cabin ownership area is at the edge of a broad, gently-sloping shelf of land between Lilac Lane and Studio Road. This shelf makes an ideal area for a trail between the State Historic Park and the North American Cut Off which is a frequently traveled dirt road between Box Canyon Road and Sage Ranch Park.

The subject Wallace property is also situated at the south edge of this gently-sloped shelf. It is adjacent to the easternmost of the two Zorro's cabin parcels. During the time period that RSRPD was pursuing the Zorro's cabin parcels, the Wallace's approached staff with hopes of making a deal where the property could be permanently protected. The properties have been appraised by the MRCA and the Wallaces remain willing sellers. The proposed sale would be for the fee simple acquisition of four parcels (APNs 649-0-070-050, 649-0-070-060, 648-0-200-020, and 648-0-183-050) with a total acreage of 4.95 acres and the sale of a narrow conservation easement on APN 649-0-070-360 (approximately 0.3 acres). One small parcel is not contiguous with the others but it has conservation value and appraised at a nominal cost.

The three primary parcels contain many large outcrops that rise several hundred feet up to the described gently-sloped plateau. The northernmost lot contains a large flat open area that is accessible via the same dirt road as the Zorro's cabin parcel. The rocks in this area contain a natural basin that fills to a depth exceeding five feet with a length exceeding fifteen feet. The clear water supports many unique plant and invertebrate species including fairy shrimp. The property contains most of the values supplied by the Zorro's cabin property, including unparalleled views of the San Fernando Valley and Chatsworth Reservoir, just not as many oak trees or a historic film set cabin.

The MRCA has requested a grant to fund the acquisition of the parcels as described above. Proposed funding for the acquisition would be split between two sources: Proposition 50 and Proposition 84. Proposition 84 funding will be available to the Conservancy July 1, 2007, if the FY 07-08 State Budget is approved. A portion of the acquisition is anticipated to be funded by the Santa Susana Mountains Park Association and/or Foundation; however, that additional funding would not reduce amount of grant funds necessary to complete the acquisition.

Proposition 84, the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, was approved by voters in November 2006. The measure includes funding designated to the Conservancy in Chapter Five for the protection and restoration of rivers, lakes streams, their watersheds and associated land, water and other natural resources throughout the Upper Los Angeles River watershed, and in Chapter Seven for the protection of beaches, bays, and coastal waters and watersheds for Santa Monica Bay and its watersheds.